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Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Santiago **Wins** (Uruguay)

I. Introduction

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2001, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its fifty-sixth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 16th to 18th and 40th meetings, on 23, 25 and 26 October and on 24 December 2001. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/56/SR.16-18 and 40).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;[1]

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the re-engineering of the optical disk system (A/56/120/Rev.1);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/56/133 and Corr.1);

(d) Report of the Secretary-General on remote interpretation (A/56/188);

(e) Report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groups of Member States (A/56/213 and Corr.1);

(f) Report of the Secretary-General on excessive vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations and issues relating to the recruitment of language staff (A/56/277);

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/56/32).

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(g) Report of the Secretary-General on utilization of the United Nations conference centres in Bangkok and Addis Ababa (A/56/293);

(h) Report of the Secretary-General on the availability of documentation for the proper functioning of intergovernmental bodies (A/56/299);

(i) Report of the Secretary-General on submission of documentation consistent with the six-week rule (A/56/300);

(j) Report of the Secretary-General regarding the implementation of recommendations regarding the *United Nations Chronicle* (A/56/339);

(k) Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/56/475);

(l) Letter dated 31 July 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (A/56/261);

(m) Report of the Secretary-General on continued multilingual development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations web site (A/AC.198/2001/8).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/56/L.24

4. At the 40th meeting, on 24 December, the representative of Austria, coordinator of the informal consultations on the item, introduced, on behalf of the Chairman, a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/56/L.24).

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/56/L.24 without a vote (see para. 6).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

6. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 43/222 A to E of 21 December 1988, 50/11 of 2 November 1995, 54/248 of 23 December 1999 and 55/222 of 23 December 2000,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences[2] and the reports of the Secretary-General,[3]

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[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/56/32).

[3] A/56/120/Rev.1, A/56/133 and Corr.1, A/56/188, A/56/213 and Corr.1, A/56/277, A/56/293, A/56/299, A/56/300, A/56/339 and A/AC.198/2001/8.

Having also considered the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions,[4]

Reiterates the provisions of its resolutions 51/211 of 18 December 1996, 52/214 of 22 December 1997, 53/208 A to E of 18 December 1998, 54/248 of 23 December 1999 and 55/222 of 23 December 2000,

I

Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work of the Committee on Conferences, and endorses the recommendations contained in its report,[1] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

2. *Approves* the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2002-2003, as submitted by the Committee on Conferences,[5] taking into account the observations of the Committee,[6] also subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

3. *Authorizes* the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments to the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2002-2003 that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session;

4. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat took into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A, 54/248 and 55/222 concerning Orthodox Good Friday and the official holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to observe those decisions when planning their meetings;

5. *Reaffirms* its decision that the headquarters rule shall be adhered to by all bodies, and decides that waivers to the headquarters rule shall be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations as recommended by the Committee on Conferences for adoption by the General Assembly;

6. *Also reaffirms* the general principle established in the headquarters rule, and in particular, that all meetings related to environment and human settlements that are organized by the United Nations Environment Programme and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), respectively, should be held at Nairobi, being the headquarters of the Programme and Habitat;

7. *Further reaffirms* the relevant provisions established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/11 regarding multilingualism;

8. *Requests* the Committee on Conferences and the Secretary-General, when planning the calendar of conferences and meetings, to avoid simultaneous peak periods at the various duty stations and to avoid scheduling meetings of related intergovernmental bodies too closely together;

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[4] A/56/475.

[5] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/56/32), annex.

[6] Ibid., paras. 22 and 23.

II
Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. *Approves* the guidelines on limiting meeting duration contained in the annex to the present resolution;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to further enhance the established practice of workload sharing among duty stations in documentation services as a means to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources, and to include information on these efforts in the context of a single, comprehensive report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

3. *Also requests* the Secretary-General, bearing in mind the recent organizational changes, to ensure that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services is considered the appropriate executive authority to oversee, coordinate and enhance the global management and delivery of United Nations conference services, under the legislative authority of the General Assembly and through oversight and examination by the Committee on Conferences;

4. *Reaffirms* the terms of reference and main functions of the Committee on Conferences as formulated in section I, paragraph 1, of resolution 41/213 and in resolution 43/222 B;

5. *Welcomes* the improved participation of observers in the work of the Committee on Conferences, the changes in the procedure governing the participation of observers and the decision of the Committee to keep this procedure under review;

6. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the mechanisms available for addressing the concerns of Member States about the efficiency, quality and delivery of conference services, including information about the way in which the concerns of Member States are recorded and reported, and the grouping of these issues in reports to the General Assembly;

7. *Welcomes* the establishment of a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and notes with satisfaction that the conference-servicing facility at the United Nations Office at Nairobi is becoming organizationally, functionally and budgetarily an integral part of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services;

8. *Notes with appreciation* the increase in the number of multilingual meetings to be held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and with the participation of the Nairobi interpretation team elsewhere in 2001 and 2002, as well as the cost-saving effect of the establishment of the Nairobi interpretation service for the regular budget in terms of temporary assistance;

9. *Emphasizes* the importance of providing adequate conference-servicing resources to all United Nations conference centres, for the effective and efficient discharge of their mandates;

10. *Notes* the improvement in the rate of utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as recorded during the most recent reporting period;

11. *Urges* all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements, and

encourages Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to increase their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi;

12. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to assist the bodies mentioned in paragraph 11 in improving this situation, and requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to that end;

13. *Encourages* all United Nations bodies and expert groups not subject to the headquarters rule to hold some of their meetings at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

14. *Strongly discourages* any invitation for hosting meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for United Nations centres with a low utilization level;

15. *Further encourages* the Secretary-General to continue to intensify efforts being made by the United Nations Office at Nairobi to attract more meetings to its facilities;

16. *Reiterates its request* to the Committee on Conferences to consult with those bodies that consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources;

17. *Reiterates* that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority;

18. *Decides* to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2002-2003 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision;

19. *Notes* the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States are met;

20. *Notes with concern* the difficulties experienced by some Member States owing to the lack of conference services for some meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide information on meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States not serviced by conference services in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003;

22. *Also requests* the Secretary-General, when preparing budget proposals for conference services, to ensure that the level of resources proposed for temporary assistance is commensurate with the full demand for services, estimated on the basis of current experience;

23. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to continue to report on the utilization rates of interpretation services and conference facilities at all duty stations;

24. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to consider improving and modernizing the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-sixth session, through the Committee on Conferences;

III
Documentation- and publication-related matters

1. *Notes with deep concern* the low rate of compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of documentation, and encourages the Secretary-General, in view of the impact of late submissions on the timely issuance of documents, to deal with this alarming situation;

2. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages of the General Assembly;

3. *Deeply regrets* the failure of author departments to abide by section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to take corrective measures to ensure the full implementation of this provision and to report to the General Assembly in the first part of its resumed fifty-sixth session;

4. *Notes* that the failure to abide by that provision also connotes failure to abide by the six-week rule for the availability of documents as well as General Assembly resolution 50/11 of 2 November 1995 on multilingualism, in which the Assembly recalled the need to ensure the simultaneous distribution of documents in the six official languages of the United Nations;

5. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to direct all departments to include, where appropriate, the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(a) A summary of the report;

(b) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(c) Relevant background information;

6. *Reiterates* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and expert bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

7. *Requests* the Office of Internal Oversight Services to submit its reports in accordance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B;

8. *Regrets* that, if a report is issued late, some departments of the Secretariat still do not indicate the reasons for the delay when the report is introduced;

9. *Reiterates its decision* that, if a report is submitted late to conference services, the reasons therefor should be included in a footnote to the document;

10. *Decides* to approve the report of the Secretary-General on measures taken by the Secretariat to strengthen responsibility and accountability in the submission of documentation,[7] with the exception of those described in paragraph 12, and requests the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on measures taken to ensure full implementation of the report;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to develop an effective accountability and responsibility system within the Secretariat in order to ensure timely submission of documents for processing, and to report thereon, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session;

12. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of the organs concerned, when they are taking action on draft resolutions and decisions, rules 78 and 120 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

13. *Notes with concern* the delay in the issuance of verbatim and summary records, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures to ameliorate the situation;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to study the possibility of further measures in this regard, including, inter alia, enhanced cooperation between the production of press releases by the Department of Public Information and the preparation of summary records by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, bearing in mind the different nature of press releases and summary records;

15. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure the communication of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly to the States Members of the United Nations within fifteen days of the closure of each session;

16. *Welcomes* the new format for the issuance of the *Official Records* of the resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth regular session, in accordance with the request contained in resolution 54/248, section C, paragraph 3;

17. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure fully the issuance of all documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Arabic, which is most relevant to the requirements of the Member States of the region, as well as in the other working languages of the Commission to meet the requirements of readers outside the region, as appropriate, and to report thereon to the General Assembly by its fifty-seventh session;

IV
Translation- and interpretation-related matters

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General not to conduct further pilot projects on remote interpretation until technological developments so warrant;

2. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to provide a comprehensive comparative cost-benefit analysis on the use of remote interpretation at all United Nations duty stations, as recipients and as providers of that service, covering, inter

[7] A/56/300.

alia, direct and indirect related costs and utilization rates, as well as issues pertaining to the working conditions of interpreters;

3. *Decides* to approve, for an initial period of one year, the training initiative for interpreters who, on the first competitive examination, scored higher than the benchmark of 55 per cent and who possess those language combinations that are insufficiently represented on the roster of successful candidates, subject to the submission to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session of information on the results of the training activities, the continuing need for the programme and related financial arrangements;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide updated information to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, under the agenda item entitled "Human resources management," on current practices related to the special ceiling on the United Nations annual earnings for United Nations retirees employed on a short-term basis in language services, as established by the Assembly in its decision 51/408 of 4 November 1996, with a view to reviewing this issue;

5. *Decides* to conduct a comprehensive review of the current norms and standards of productivity in the language services and the impact of ongoing technological innovations on their work, and requests the Secretary-General to present a detailed report on the subject, through Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session;

6. *Reiterates its concern* at the high rate of self-revision in the translation services, which exceeded the benchmark, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to accord high priority to the post of reviser and to reduce reliance on self-revision to the maximum extent, and to take these considerations into account when filling vacancies in the translation services;

7. *Notes with deep concern* that some official documents are not translated into all the official languages of the Organization;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the Secretariat undertakes to translate all United Nations documents into all the other official languages of the Organization simultaneously, including documents for which circulation is requested under agenda items of the principle deliberative bodies of the United Nations, regardless of their length;

9. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to fill expeditiously the remaining vacancies in the interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its resumed fifty-sixth session;

10. *Further requests* the Secretary-General to accelerate his efforts to fill vacant posts in interpretation and translation at Headquarters and at all other United Nations duty stations;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General to refrain from using the terms "different languages" or "multilingual" in official documents when referring to the six official languages of the United Nations;

12. *Expresses concern* about the quality of interpretation services provided to intergovernmental meetings, and requests the Secretary-General to ensure the highest standards of quality for interpretation services provided to these meetings;

13. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that training opportunities in the six official languages are equally available to all language staff, including those at duty stations away from Headquarters;

14. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that efforts continue to be made to improve the quality control of language services at all duty stations;

15. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, reflects the specificity of each language;

16. *Also reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General, in order to further improve the quality of translation of documents issued in the six official languages, to ensure continuous dialogue between translation staff and interpretation staff, among United Nations headquarters at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, and between translation divisions and Member States with regard to the standardization of the terminology used;

17. *Further reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to hold informational meetings in order to brief Member States periodically on the terminology used;

18. *Requests* the Secretary-General to conduct consultations, with Member States concerned, on the improvement of translation services;

V

Information technology

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session a progress report on the use of information technology in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conferences Services, including, inter alia, voice recognition, remote translation, computer-assisted translation, the Electronic Documents Registration Information and Tracking System, the new stock control system for documents and publications, digitization of meeting recording systems, electronic planning and servicing of meetings, and computerized terminology data banks, specifying in particular the impact of these technologies on the working methods and productivity of the personnel of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services;

2. *Notes with concern* the content of paragraph 7 of the report of the Secretary-General,[8] which stresses that progress in the development of the United Nations web site on the Internet in the six official languages has been slower than expected, and that the realization of a truly equal multilingual web site will remain elusive;

Annex

Guidelines on limiting meeting duration

1. Meetings normally should be held during regular meeting hours, namely, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m., on working days;

2. The Secretariat should intensify coordination between its relevant units with a view to planning for the provision of conference services;

[8] A/AC.198/2001/8.

3. Intergovernmental bodies should undertake the review of their meeting patterns and, in coordination with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, adjust their meeting requests for subsequent sessions accordingly;

4. Requests for the extension of sessions beyond the originally scheduled dates, resumed sessions and other inter-sessional departures would continue to be submitted to the Committee on Conferences and handled in accordance with General Assembly resolution 43/222 B and with past practice as agreed by the Committee.